DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 966 SO 016 869

AUTHOR Morrow, Lesley Mandel
TITLE Promoting Voluntary Reading in School and Home. Fastback 225.
INSTITUTION Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington, Ind.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-87367-225-9
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 40p.; This fastback was partially funded by the Clearwater-St. Petersburg Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa.
AVAILABLE FROM Phi Delta Kappa, Eighth and Union, Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402 ($0.75; quantity discounts available).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Strategies; Elementary Education; *Independent Reading; Learning Activities; Parent Participation; *Parent Role; Preschool Education; Reading Habits; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; *Recreational Reading; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Role; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This booklet describes methods that teachers can use in recreational reading in early childhood and elementary classrooms and suggests ways to help parents promote voluntary reading in their children. The first section deals with "Promoting Voluntary Reading through Classroom Library Corners." Discussed are the value of classroom library corners, their physical features, their management books and materials to use, and how to integrate instructional activities with the library corner. Comments of teachers and students about library corners are included. The second section deals with "The Teacher as Facilitator of Voluntary Reading." Teacher attitudes, recreational reading periods, and reading activities for children are discussed. The third section deals with "Promoting Voluntary Reading in the Home." Discussed are research on home influence on voluntary reading, what teachers can do to promote voluntary reading at home, and parents' responses to home reading programs. Also included is a parents' checklist for promoting voluntary reading at home. The concluding section discusses "Reading by Choice, Not by Coercion." The booklet concludes with references. (RM)

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Promoting Voluntary Reading in School and Home

Lesley Mandel Morrow

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Her area of research deals with early childhood literacy development, with emphasis on the promotion of voluntary reading. This fastback is based on her research studies dealing with voluntary reading. One of these studies (co-authored with Carol Weinstein) won the Elva Knight Research Grant Award for 1983 and 1984 from the International Reading Association and a research grant award from the Rutgers University Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa.

Series Editor, Derek L. Burleson

Promoting Voluntary Reading in School and Home

by

Lesley Mandel Morrow

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 85-61796
ISBN 0-87367-225-9
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Bloomington, Indiana

This fastback is sponsored by the Clearwater-St. Petersburg Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa, which made a generous contribution toward publication costs.

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Introduction

Plato said, "What is honored in a country will be cultivated there." Since literacy is honored in our democratic society, the promotion of voluntary reading in children should rank high among the goals of both parents and teachers. The habit of voluntary reading should be cultivated in children as an activity of personal choice both at home and school, beginning in the very earliest years.

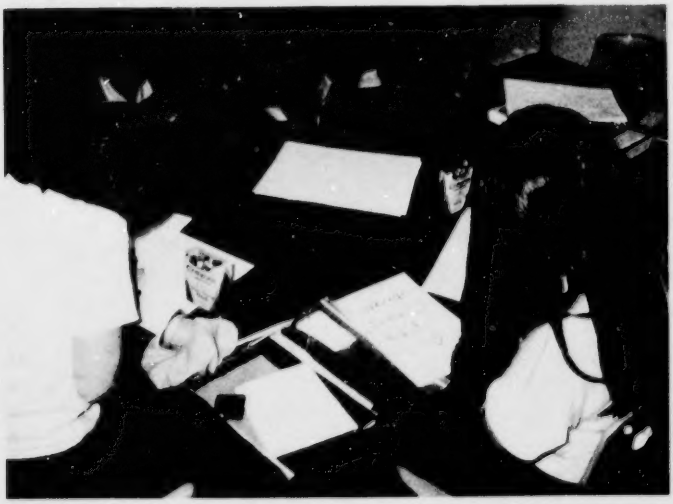
Through voluntary reading children begin to associate reading with pleasure from the time they are very young. If children first enjoy looking at books and eventually reading them, they will read more, which in turn leads to improved reading ability. Voluntary or recreational reading must be an integral part of the total developmental reading program.

In this fastback I use the terms *voluntary reading* and *recreational reading* to mean children's choice to spend portions of their time in reading or participating in other reading-related activities, including listening to stories, looking at picture books, telling stories with feltboard story characters, and reciting and reading poetry. It also includes voluntary reading of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and brochures; listening to taped stories; reading directions; and reading informational literature.

While there is general agreement about the benefits of voluntary reading, substantial numbers of children do not read very much on their own, either for pleasure or for information. Vincent Greaney (1980) found that 22% of the fifth-grade students he surveyed chose not to read at all. Those children who did read spent only 5% of their leisure time doing so. Spiegel (1981) reports that a 1972 Gallup survey estimated that 80% of the books read in the United

States are read by only 10% of the population. In addition, the survey found that half the adults sampled admitted never having read a book all the way through.

An extensive investigation carried out by the Book Industry Study Group (1984) revealed that the number of young people under the age of 21 identified as readers dropped from 75% to 63% in the eight years between 1976 and 1984. The group hypothesized that the many new forms of electronic entertainment introduced in the last six to eight years may have diverted the attention of youth from books. On the other hand, earlier research on television had been rather inconclusive on that point. TV viewing and reading habits do not appear to be highly correlated either negatively or positively. Some children who are heavy TV viewers read a lot and others read very little (Whitehead, Capey, and Maddren 1975). This suggests that if strong voluntary reading habits are established at an early age, television and other electronic forms



Children enjoy being authors. With paper, crayons, scissors, and a stapler, these children are writing, illustrating, and binding their own books.

of entertainment may be used by youngsters without undue interference with their recreational reading habits.

Beyond the common belief that voluntary reading is desirable, there is considerable empirical evidence of a connection between voluntary reading and success in school. Studies of children identified as voluntary readers in elementary and middle grades found that those same youngsters demonstrated high levels of reading achievement (Greaney 1980; Whitehead, Capey, and Maddren 1975). Morrow (1983) found that kindergartners who demonstrated a voluntary interest in books scored significantly higher on standardized reading-readiness tests and were rated higher by teachers on work habits, general school performance, and social and emotional development than children who had low interest in books.

According to Chomsky (1972), children who are introduced to books at an early age tend to develop sophisticated language structures. Cohen (1968) concludes that the language structures and vocabulary children gain from early exposure to literature correlate with their subsequent success in learning to read. Both structures and vocabulary can be significantly improved in youngsters by regularly listening to stories read aloud.

Children with early experiences with books accumulate background knowledge, an appreciation for books, and an increased interest in learning to read. They often begin to read early or learn to read more easily (Durkin 1966). Bissett (1970) contends that discussing books provides a foundation for comprehension skills because of the language development, background knowledge, and sense of story structure acquired.

Opportunities to read books allow a child to practice those skills that are taught in typical reading instruction programs. Without the opportunity to participate in recreational reading in school, many children will not read enough to become competent in these skills. Reading requires practice in order to achieve fluency. Practice must be easy enough to give the child a sense of success and enjoyable enough so the child will continue to read by choice.

Bloom (1964) points out that a child's reading habits are developed early in life. Typically, the kind of reader a person is going to be throughout life has been established by the sixth grade. It seems appropriate, therefore, to promote voluntary reading from the time that children are very young to ensure that the benefits of such efforts persist in their later lives.

This fastback describes empirically tested practices that teachers can use in recreational reading in early childhood and elementary classrooms. When incorporated into the regular reading instruction program, such practices can help to develop voluntary readers. In addition, suggestions are given for parents to help them promote voluntary reading in their children.

Promoting Voluntary Reading Through Classroom Library Corners

Most elementary schools today have a central library that, if staffed by a trained children's librarian, can contribute much to the classroom teacher's voluntary reading program. Unfortunately, because the central library serves such a large number of children, individual students or classroom groups often have to visit it by special schedule. One way to provide greater and more immediate accessibility to reading materials is to establish library corners in every classroom. Such a corner in the classroom suggests to the child that it is an area for both learning and recreational reading. The teacher's efforts in making the library corner an inviting and attractive part of the room tell the child that voluntary, independent reading is valued.

Value of Classroom Library Corners

While it is important to have a central library in every school, Beckman (1972) maintains that classroom mini-libraries are essential in order to provide immediate access to reading materials. Bissett (1969) found that children in classrooms containing literature collections read 50% more books than did children in classrooms without such collections. Coody (1973) and Huck (1976) both report that the efforts spent in creating an inviting atmosphere for a classroom library corner are rewarded by children's increased interest in reading and their consequent achievement in becoming more skillful readers.

The physical environment of a classroom is often overlooked as a factor in learning. Research on the physical characteristics of a classroom by Bumsted (1981), Phyfe-Perkins (1979), Sutfin (1980), and Weinstein (1977) has shown

that changes in the physical environment of a classroom can influence students' choices of learning activities. A study by Morrow and Weinstein (1982) showed that well-designed classroom library corners significantly increased the number of kindergarten children who chose to participate in reading activities in the corners during free-play periods.

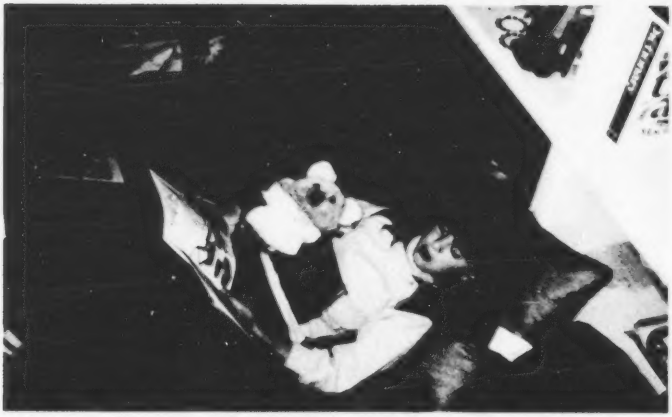
Morrow (1982, in press) observed library corners in nursery through third-grade classrooms and identified specific design characteristics that correlated with children's use of the corners during free-choice periods. Another study (Morrow and Weinstein in press) indicated that in second-grade classrooms with well-designed library corners and with regularly scheduled activities, children's participation in reading activities during free-choice periods improved significantly over that of control groups. Conversely, Rosenthal (1973), Shure (1963), and Morrow (1982) found that poorly designed library corners were among the least popular areas during free-choice periods in early childhood classrooms. Suffice it to say that the physical features of a classroom library corner are important if they are to induce children to use the corner voluntarily during free-choice times.

Physical Features of Good Library Corners

The classroom library corner should be a focal area in the room. It should be immediately visible and inviting to anyone entering the classroom. To give it a feeling of privacy and physical definition, it should be partitioned off from the rest of the room on two or three sides. This can be done using existing classroom furniture, such as bookshelves, a piano, file cabinets, or free-standing bulletin boards. The dimensions of a classroom library corner will vary depending on the size of the classroom. Generally, it should be large enough for five to six children to fit in it comfortably.

Well-designed library corners have two types of bookshelves. The first type houses the bulk of the collection, with the books shelved with the spines facing outward. The other type of shelving is open-face, which allows the covers of the books to be seen. This is important for calling attention to special books. Another type of open-face shelving is the circular wire type, commonly found in bookstores.

If bookshelves are not available in the classroom, they can be constructed easily using wooden boards supported by cinder blocks. Open-face shelves



Large pillows and stuffed animals in a library corner provide a comfortable and relaxing setting in which children can read.

can also be easily constructed with triple-wall corrugated cardboard, which can be purchased at most lumber yards or building supply stores. Information about cardboard carpentry is available from the Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, Mass. 02160.

Books in the collection should be shelved by category (for example, animals, science, fairy tales, poetry, etc.). This introduces children to the concept that books in libraries are organized by a system that makes them readily accessible.

The library corner should be carpeted and have some throw pillows or bean bag chairs, since a great deal of the reading and related activities will take place on the floor. If possible, there should be a small table with a few chairs where children can use headsets to listen to taped stories and where they can write their own original stories.

Children get little privacy in the school setting. The library corner that is partially partitioned off from the rest of the room provides some privacy. Listening to recorded stories on headsets provides even more privacy. An oversize carton makes a cozy private reading room in the library corner.

Attractive posters that encourage reading are available free or at low cost from the Children's Book Council (67 Irving Place, New York, N.Y. 10003)

and the American Library Association (50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Ill. 60611). Stuffed animals should also be part of the library corner, especially if they are related to storybooks available in the corner. Children enjoy reading to stuffed animals or simply holding them as they read. A feltboard, with cutouts of story characters from favorite books, is one of the heavily used materials in a library corner.

Accessibility and attractiveness are key factors in furnishing a library corner. A study by Powell (1966) demonstrated that the more immediate the access to library materials, the greater the amount of recreational reading by pupils.

Books and Materials in the Library Corner

According to Huck (1976), there should be five to eight books per child in a classroom library. Obtaining this many books initially may seem like an expensive proposition, but a teacher with ingenuity can build a sizeable classroom library rather quickly.

A basic collection of quality paperbacks for children can be purchased at small cost from a school's petty cash allowance or by the PTA. Many public libraries allow teachers to borrow up to 20 books per month, books that can be placed, in turn, in the classroom library. Similar borrowing is usually available from the school's central library. With an inter-classroom loan system, new titles can be circulated among library corners in separate classrooms.

Parents can be asked to donate books their children no longer use at home. Flea markets and secondhand bookshops are good sources for inexpensive books. Discarded basal readers and certain textbooks can be torn apart and selected stories and articles rebound. The rebinding of books can become a project for room mothers or for the children themselves. New bindings with art work by students can give a new look to old books. Also, books written cooperatively by the entire class and those written by individual children can be bound and placed in the library corner.

Children's paperback book clubs offer inexpensive books for children and free bonus books for bulk purchases. Two publishers of classroom book clubs that have served schools over the years are Scholastic Inc. (730 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003) and Xerox Educational Publications (1250 Firwood Avenue, P.O. Box 2639, Columbus, Ohio 43216).

Children's magazines and newspapers belong in the classroom library, even if they are not current. For the cost of mailing and shipping, some publishers and local magazine agencies donate outdated periodicals to schools free of charge.

Books and materials selected should appeal to a variety of interests and have a three- or four-grade range in reading levels. It is advisable to have multiple copies of popular books. Children are their own best advertisers of specific titles. They enjoy reading what their friends are reading.

The collection should have several titles in the following categories:

1. picture books with few or no words, alphabet books, number books, concept books;
2. picture story books in which text and illustrations are closely associated;
3. books of fairy tales and nursery rhymes;
4. poetry for all seasons, holidays, and topics studied in school;
5. stories that deal with real-life issues faced by youngsters, such as family conflicts, loneliness, frustration, handicaps, socioeconomic status, divorce, new siblings, and children's cruelty to each other;
6. nonfiction on such topics as the planets, plants, animals, and other countries;
7. biographies of popular figures of the present and past;
8. novels, especially popular books for advanced readers;
9. easy-to-read books with controlled, repeated vocabularies, large print, and illustrations closely associated with text;
10. joke books, riddle books, fables, serial books, participation books, craft books, and books related to television specials or series.

Librarians at school and in the community are excellent sources for book title recommendations. Also available are lists and recommendations from the National Council of Teachers of English (1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Ill. 61801), the International Reading Association (P.O. Box 8139, Newark, Del. 19714), the Children's Book Council (67 Irving Place, New York, N.Y. 10003), and the American Library Association (50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Ill. 60611).

Managing the Classroom Library Corner

Children should be involved in the planning, design, and management of the library corner. They can help choose the area of the room for the library corner, develop rules for its use, select books and other materials for it, and maintain it in an orderly manner. The teacher can ask the class to select a name for the library corner, such as "Book Nook."

Color coding is an easy technique to use for organizing and shelving books and other materials. Different colors represent different types of books. All poetry anthologies, for example, might be identified with blue circle stickers on their spines and then placed together on a shelf marked *poetry*, with a blue sticker next to the word. Another color can represent books about animals, a third color for holidays, and so on. Or the teacher can make a color code chart that identifies the various categories in the entire library collection. Other organizational systems can be devised, but the important point is to keep the system simple so that it can be easily understood and used by young children in selecting books and other materials.

To ensure continued interest in the library corner, new books and materials must be circulated and recirculated regularly. Approximately 25 new books should be introduced every two weeks, replacing 25 of the less popular titles. With recirculation old books become "new" books that are welcomed back as old friends about every three months. By recirculating it should not be necessary to purchase many new books.

Books from the library corner should be available for students to check out and take home for a week at a time. The system for checking books in and out should be simple. Again, various easy systems can be used. At specified times during the school day, very young children can bring books they would like to check out to the teacher, who notes the date, the name of the child, and the book title. Older children can be taught to check out books themselves. Some teachers just post a clipboard with a pencil attached and a form with a column for Name, Book Title, Date Out, and Date In. Children fill in the information on the form without any supervision from the teacher.

Integrating Instructional Activities with the Library Corner

Many instructional activities in reading and in the content areas can be integrated with the resources in the library corner. For instance, if a teacher

is doing a science lesson on the life cycle of a butterfly, the book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle 1983) can be subsequently featured on the open-face bookshelf where it will attract additional interest on the topic. During "Sharing Time" when children tell about books they have read at home, they can be invited to bring the book to class, where it can be featured on the open-face shelf as an inducement for other children to read.

Featured books should be changed regularly, with no book on an open-face shelf for more than two weeks at a time. Whenever new materials are added to the library corner, the teacher should take a few moments to introduce them to the children.

Many language arts activities can be centered on the library corner. With felt story characters and feltboard, roll movies, and puppets, children can share stories, one reading while others act out what is being read. Telling or re-telling stories as well as role playing stories are valuable cooperative language activities (Morrow 1985; Pellegrini and Galda 1982). Children also can work alone, listening to records and tapes, cutting out story characters for the feltboard, writing their own stories, binding their own books, and making their own roll movies. For these activities it is important to keep the corner stocked with felt strips, construction paper, scissors, glue, writing paper, pencils, felt-tip pens, a stapler, a feltboard, and a roll movie box.

Children enjoy keeping track of the number of books they read. There are various ways of doing this. One way that has been particularly successful involves the use of a special bulletin board on which curtain rod hooks are attached, one for each child in the class. On each hook you hang a loose-leaf ring holding a 3×5 index card with a child's name. As children read books, they take a 3×5 card, record the title of the book read, the date they completed reading it, and then hang the card on their individual rings.

Comments of Teachers and Students About the Library Corner

A survey conducted by the author of teachers' attitudes toward classroom library corners revealed that before they established and used them, many teachers believed that there was not enough classroom space for such corners, or that they were not necessary since the school had a central library. These same teachers, interviewed after participating in a study that included the introduction and use of library corners in their classrooms, made the following comments:

I was surprised that space could be made in my room for a library corner and that so many materials could fit into such a small area.

The library corner became a place where children of all reading ability levels mingled together. These were children who had never interacted with each other before. It was a place where enthusiasm for books and literature activities became infectious.

The features I particularly liked in the library corners and will continue using were the soft pillows, open-face bookshelves that featured particular books, the variety of books, "read" posters, flannel boards and story characters with accompanying books, and the bulletin board where children kept records on 3×5 cards of books they read. Allowing children to check books in and out and to maintain the orderly appearance of the corner helped to make them feel more responsible.

This boy is keeping track of the books he has read by writing the titles on cards and adding them to a ring that hangs on a bulletin board in the library corner.

As a teacher in the control group who did not participate in the study, it was clear that without library corners and specified guidelines for using them, with nothing other than a shelf of books, most children will not choose voluntary reading activities when faced with other choices.

Several children also expressed their opinions concerning the classroom library corners:

I like the quiet and privacy in the library corner, especially when I use the headset and taped stories.

I like the library corner because I get to do things with my friends. We read to each other and do felt stories and roll movies.

I like the library corner. I can cuddle up on a pillow and read a book. It's nice.

The Teacher as Facilitator of Voluntary Reading

The teacher plays a critical role in influencing children's attitudes toward voluntary reading. Children live what they learn. If children live associating reading only with repetition of skill, drill, teach, and test, they will never reach for a book on their own initiative. If, on the other hand, children live in an environment that associates reading with pleasure and enjoyment as well as with skill development, they are likely to become voluntary readers. How children live and learn in the classroom ultimately determines whether they will live their lives as literate or aliterate individuals (those who can read but choose not to).

Literature in the Classroom

Much has been written about the use of literature in the classroom. Arbuthnot and Sutherland (1977), Cullinan (1977), Huck (1976), Smith and Parker (1977), and Stewig and Sebesta (1978) stress the importance of planned programs that encourage pleasurable experiences with literature. Such programs, they say, create interest in and enthusiasm for books. Teachers should read to children daily and discuss the stories both they and their students read. Children should be encouraged to read to each other and to tell stories to the rest of the class. Books should be borrowed from school and taken home, and books from home should be brought to school and shared with others. Exposure to books and stories should be frequent and integrated with teaching in the content areas.

There are many things teachers can do through direct instruction to move their students beyond the routines of skill, drill, teach, and test toward the longer-range goal of reading voluntarily. First, they can expose children to

literature daily. Simply by reading or telling stories and discussing them, the teacher involves children in questioning, exploring, and acquiring factual information.

Reading or telling stories to children should be carried out in a relaxed, pleasant atmosphere, with the teacher sitting in the same place every day. Having a different child each day sit close by while the teacher is reading gives each of them a feeling of being special.

Young children enjoy seeing illustrations in books during story time and they enjoy expressive presentations. Books that offer specific directions for reading aloud and telling stories are: *Learning to Love Literature* (Lamme 1981), *Using Literature with Young Children* (Coody 1973), and *Super Tips for Storytelling* (Morrow 1981).

At least weekly there should be some reading and reciting of poetry, a form of literature almost forgotten in the curriculum. During reading group periods children can be asked to share their impressions of books they have read on their own. This gives them the idea that there is a connection between reading skill development and reading for pleasure.

Other practices that make reading a pleasurable activity and thus encourage voluntary reading are having a weekly period when the principal, secretary, custodian, parents, or older students read to children and children read to each other or to younger children. Writing to authors and illustrators gives children an opportunity to share their reactions with the creators of books. And if the children are fortunate enough to have the author or illustrator respond, then the books become even more special. Involving children in storytelling, with or without props, helps them to improve comprehension, have a better sense of story structure, and to use more complex language patterns (Morrow 1985).

Books can be used throughout the curriculum. In the primary grades, number and alphabet books support the learning of those concepts. A story such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* reinforces and enriches a science lesson on the life cycle of a butterfly. Books can be used as a basis for many art activities, such as drawing a picture about a story, painting class murals, constructing dioramas of stories, building mobiles of stories, and creating pictures in the style of specific illustrators.

Songs like "I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly" have been made into picture story books (Mills and Bonne 1961). The books can be read and

While one child reads a book aloud, her friend uses a felt character to act out the story.

then the songs sung. These are especially good for beginning readers and children with reading problems because, since they know the words to the songs, they are able to read the books with ease.

Children enjoy many of the books that are spin-offs from popular TV programs. There are books from "Sesame Street," "Little House on the Prairie," and such sitcoms as "Charles in Charge." There are also books related to TV specials such as the life of Helen Keller and the National Geographic specials. By being alert to upcoming TV specials, as well as to what programs children are watching, the teacher can obtain the related books and offer them as voluntary reading at school or at home.

Recreational Reading Periods

It is important to schedule regular periods for recreational reading. One practice that has been common for a number of years is what is called sustained silent reading (SSR). During SSR, children and often all other persons in a school – teachers, custodians, secretaries, and administrators – select a book to read quietly and simultaneously for 10 to 30 minutes. The intent of SSR is to ensure that time is available for uninterrupted reading. With the entire school involved, it conveys the message that *everyone* is a reader.

However, because SSR is meant to be a quiet time, with little socialization and with little choice other than selecting the particular title one chooses to read, some children do nothing during SSR but daydream. If one is trying to create voluntary readers, more options should be provided in a recreational reading period. Setting aside 30 minutes three to five times weekly for reading or reading-related activities provides for the variety, the free choice, and the flexibility required if children are to become voluntary readers.

To use the recreational reading period effectively, the following procedures are helpful:

1. Begin by introducing a small number of activities and then add to them as children become used to working independently.
2. Stress that the classroom should be relatively quiet, with minimal movement during the activity period.
3. Introduce new books and other materials as they are added to the classroom library corner.
4. Discuss care of the books and other materials and show where they are located in the classroom library corner so everyone knows where to find them and where to return them.
5. Provide a list of available activities and a check sheet on which children can indicate their choice of activity.
6. Encourage children to stay with their selections for the entire activity period.
7. Tell the children that they may work alone or with other children and that they may take materials out of the library corner and work at their desks or in other parts of the room.
8. Post a schedule with the names of children who can work in the library corner each day, since there will not be enough room for all.
9. Restate the objectives of the recreational reading period: to read, to enjoy reading, and to practice the skills learned in reading groups.

During the first weeks of administering a recreational period, the teacher should circulate among the children to see what they are doing and to help them if needed. Once the children have become familiar with the procedures and can work independently, the teacher can use the period for enjoying his or her own recreational reading activities.

The recreational reading period exposes children to reading in many forms and gives them the opportunity to make choices. It is a positive approach toward activating interest in voluntary reading.

Reading Activities for Children

Young children need to be actively involved to learn. They need to have a variety of experiences in which they can actively participate in reading and related activities. Centered in classroom library corners, promoted through recreational reading periods, and integrated with skill instruction in reading and content instruction in other curricular areas, these experiences will nurture voluntary reading among the young. Morrow and Weinstein (in press) found that the reading level of a child was not a factor in the use of the library corner as a free-choice activity. Rather, it was involvement with the variety of materials and activities in the corners that made this choice a preferred one.

There is a social context that contributes to the success of the total recreational reading program (see Holdaway 1979 and Teale 1978). Children attract other children to specific books and other activities, such as roll movies and feltboards. Children are their own best advertisements for books. If a youngster is excited about a particular book and presents an advertisement for it to classmates, it is almost guaranteed to become a "best seller" in that classroom.

Making one's own books, either individually or as a class, is a natural outgrowth of involvement in a recreational reading program. Children are inspired by their participation to become authors themselves. Providing the materials and guidelines for writing, illustrating, and binding their own books lets children see that their work is respected and valued by the teacher.

A related activity is sponsoring an all-school Young Authors' Conference in which children share the books they have written with classmates and parents. In conjunction with the conference there might be such special activities as visits by a children's book author or illustrator, skits, public readings, book celebrations with teachers and children dressing up as favorite book characters, storytelling sessions, and viewing of films, filmstrips, or videotapes of stories.

Less common, but certainly a worthwhile project for promoting voluntary reading, is a book store in the school itself, staffed and operated by a student group, teacher advisor, librarian, administrator, or parent organization.

Attitudes of Teachers Toward Voluntary Reading

In a survey of attitudes toward the promotion of voluntary reading (Morrow in press), teachers ranked it fourth in importance, trailing comprehension, word recognition skills, and study skills. They felt that development of voluntary reading was an important goal, but not a top priority. Emphasis on skill development and covering the material in basal readers, they believed, would increase standardized test scores. They indicated that there was little time for the activities recommended to promote voluntary reading, no time for recreational reading periods.

Teachers who expressed similar attitudes to those described above were interviewed after participating in a study that included regularly scheduled literary activities and free-choice periods when children could choose recreational reading. Comments from some of those interviews follow:

> I feel much more committed to the need for enriching the student's reading by incorporating many different types of literature activities into my school day. The positive results in the children's increased use of literature has made me feel that the time was well spent and worth spending in the future, even though it may detract from other areas. I was skeptical about the time allotment needed for literature activities. I do not have that concern now.

> My involvement in the program made me realize that the activities that promote voluntary reading need to be an integral part of the reading instructional program. Based on this new awareness, I will continue to integrate literary activities as part of my reading program and not just as a supplement when I have time. I realized that when they are being taught skills, kids don't really know that they are reading; while with the literature program they not only know they are reading, but they are enjoying reading.

> I became convinced of how important I am as a teacher in influencing children's attitudes about voluntary reading. Participating in the program demonstrated how important the teacher's involvement, enthusiasm, and encouragement are in making children more interested and comfortable with books.

> During the literature activity period, children had to make decisions about what they wanted to do. It became apparent to me that as teachers we seldom allow children to do this. I became aware of the necessity for providing decision-making experiences in my classroom. Children were able to make choices, socialize, and plan projects together without the direction of the teacher and

without hassles. In addition to the benefits of being exposed to literature in a pleasurable and enjoyable manner, they had the opportunity for self-directed activity with all of its benefits.

It suddenly dawned on me that while children were participating in the literature activity time, they were having the opportunity to practice skills I had been teaching them during the reading instructional period.

Promoting Voluntary Reading in the Home

The home as well as the school can play a vital role in promoting voluntary reading. To show how the home can carry out this role, let me share a personal case study of my own daughter.

From the time she was six months old, I read to Stephanie daily. She would sit on my lap, always in the same chair; and we would look at books, talk about the pictures, and read the stories. By the time she was 18 months old, she was repeating some of the words from the text and imitated my intonation. It gave the appearance that she was "reading."

Reading to Stephanie was a ritual we both enjoyed. By the time she was 2½ she chanted some of the words with me from familiar stories that had been read to her over and over. Visiting the library was always a treat. She selected four new books to take home from each visit.

On the way home from the library one day, when she was 4½, she began reading one of the books. It was a humorous story called *Ten Apples Up on Top* (LeSieg 1961). It has a controlled, repeated vocabulary, rhyme, attractive illustrations that reflect the text, and a humorous plot. At first, I assumed the book was one we had read together. Suddenly I realized that it wasn't, and that Stephanie was reading on her own!

She read the book from beginning to end. I have never offered formal instruction, nor had she been given formal reading instruction in nursery school. There was no doubt about it, Stephanie's ability to read had developed naturally within a rich literary environment.

Her interest in reading surged. Through kindergarten and first grade her skills improved. I continued to read to her as I had in the past, especially

before she went to sleep at night as we sat side by side on her bed. Her teacher not only taught reading but also offered many enjoyable activities with literature that promoted recreational reading.

When she entered second grade I read to her less frequently, since she had established the habit of reading herself before she went to bed. Soon I was not reading to her at all. At school her teacher, who was quite caught up in skill development, neglected entirely the promotion of reading for pleasure. By the end of second grade, although she read well, Stephanie's voluntary reading habits had declined to almost nothing. She had traded reading for television. When I became aware of the situation, I panicked. How could this have happened to me, a reading specialist and avid promoter of recreational reading?

I began reading to Stephanie again daily. I read novels that were above her reading level but within her listening comprehension level. She also asked to hear her old favorite picture storybooks. In addition to library visits, we made frequent trips to the bookstore. Each time she finished a book, we went to the bookstore where she selected a new book. Fortunately, her third-grade teacher promoted reading books at school. Slowly, over the course of a year, Stephanie's voluntary reading habits were re-established.

Now in sixth grade, she is an avid reader. I still read to her occasionally, and we discuss things we have read – current events, books, and magazine articles. We still go to the bookstore together to purchase a new book after she finishes reading the last one. Stephanie still reads every night before going to bed. She seldom leaves the house without a book.

Her habits as a voluntary reader did not just happen. They had to be nurtured.

Research on Home Influence on Voluntary Reading

My experience with my own daughter is supported by reports of other researchers. Durkin (1966), Holdaway (1979), Taylor (1983), and Teale (1984) all describe home environments in which the ability to read and the desire to read voluntarily develop quite naturally. These homes provide a rich reading environment; they provide books and other reading materials from which children are free to select. They offer a social context where children are actively involved with others in the family who serve as models of involvement in literary activities. These adults reinforce the interests of their children by

interacting and cooperating with them in literary activities. These are homes that promote a natural interest in books.

Some specific characteristics of homes in which children are likely to become voluntary readers have been reported by Himmelweit and Swift (1976) in a study with elementary grade children and by Morrow (1983) in a study of kindergartners. Families of children who show a voluntary interest in books are likely to be small. Many of the parents have a college education or have graduate degrees. However, Hansen (1969) argues that it is the rich literary environment, not the parents' educational levels or occupations, that correlate most highly with children's voluntary interest in books. Other studies support the contention that rich home literary environments are a major influence in children's voluntary interest in literature.

Parents in such homes read often in their leisure time. They read novels, magazines, newspapers, and work-related materials. They own or borrow many

During her free-choice time, this girl plays with the roll movie of one of her favorite books.

books, both for themselves and for their children. Reading material can be found throughout the home, in living rooms, bedrooms, family rooms, playrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms. Parents in these homes take their children to libraries and bookstores often (Morrow 1983). They read to them daily. They enforce rules for selecting and limiting television viewing (Whitehead, Capey, and Maddren 1975).

Similar home characteristics appear in studies of children who demonstrate an early interest in books and who learn to read before direct instruction in school (Durkin 1966; Taylor 1983; Teale 1984). In addition to factors already mentioned, adults or older siblings in these homes listen to and respond to children's questions about books and print. There are crayons, pencils, and paper available for communicating through written language. Books are associated with pleasure; literary activities are rewarded. The homes are well organized, with scheduled daily activities, rules, and designated responsibilities for family members. They provide a setting where interaction between adults and children is socially, emotionally, and intellectually conducive to literary interest and growth (Holdaway 1979).

Most of the studies on the influence of the home environment on voluntary reading are correlational, and correlations do not necessarily imply cause and effect. When an interest in reading already exists in the child, parental behavior may be reinforced by children's interests, rather than vice versa. An interest in voluntary reading seems to be innate in some youngsters regardless of the environment.

Morrow (1983) found that young children who demonstrated a voluntary interest in books spent their play time at home writing and drawing with paper and crayon, watched less than two hours of television a day, and looked at books frequently. Investigations of the performance of voluntary readers in the elementary school reveal them to be high achievers, particularly in reading (Greaney 1980; Long and Henderson 1973; Whitehead, Capey, and Maddren 1975). They attend school regularly and spend a good deal of time on homework (Wilson 1984). They are rated by their teachers as higher than average in fine motor control, social and emotional maturity, work habits, and general school achievement. They also perform well on standardized reading readiness tests (Morrow 1983).

What Teachers Can Do to Promote Voluntary Reading at Home

There are many things teachers can do to help parents create an interest in children for reading on their own. While it is not the parents' job to teach the skills of reading, they can reinforce skills taught in school.

A good way to begin is to inform parents about the total reading program, both skill and recreational. Some teachers publish a newsletter several times a year that describes specific activities and events related to the reading program. Teachers can also distribute a recommended list of books to parents both for children's reading and for reading to children.

Parents' interest and support is nurtured by asking them to participate in some aspect of the reading program: reading to children in class; storytelling; helping with bookbinding; or raising money to buy books, materials, and furnishings for library corners. Whenever you include parents, you enrich your program through their contributions and their heightened interest in the work at school.

Parents' Checklist for Promoting Voluntary Reading at Home

The following checklist is one that can be given to parents to help them nurture children's voluntary interest in books. It suggests materials, activities, and attitudes that promote voluntary reading.

Materials:

1. Have at least 25 children's books available.
2. Subscribe to a children's magazine.
3. Place some of your child's and some of your own books, magazines, and newspapers in various rooms throughout your home to encourage spontaneous reading in spare moments.
4. Provide space in children's rooms to store books.
5. Provide a record-keeping system for children to keep track of books read. A simple system is 3×5 cards on which children can write the names of books they have read and dates of completion and then file them in a small filebox.
6. Provide as many of the following items as you can to encourage children to tell or create their own stories: puppets, feltboard and felt story characters, roll movies, records, tapes of stories.

7. Provide materials with which children can write, illustrate, and bind their own books: writing paper, colored construction paper, pencils, crayons, felt-tip pens, scissors, paste, and stapler.

Activities:

1. Read to your child daily and let your child read to you.
2. Visit the library once every two weeks to borrow books.
3. Visit a bookstore every two weeks and purchase a paperback.
4. Tell stories to each other.
5. Take turns talking about books and newspaper or magazine articles that members of the family have read.
6. As a family, read silently together, gathered around the kitchen table, the fireplace, or some other comfortable spot. Use the same spot always, so it is associated with reading.
7. Read poetry and recite poetry together.
8. Read books related to current television shows or movies.
9. Create a photostory with your children. Select a favorite story that has a simple plot. Have your child act out parts of the book and take slides, movies, or snapshots. Place the snapshots in an album or show the slides or movie while someone reads the story.
10. Prepare food related to books, for example, gingerbread cookies after reading *The Gingerbread Boy* (Holdsworth 1968).

Fostering Positive Attitudes:

1. Provide a model for your child by reading on your own.
2. Reward your child's literary activity with praise and encouragement.
3. Answer your children's questions about books and other materials they have read.
4. Limit the time allowed for viewing TV each day. Encourage selective viewing.
5. Do not censor what your children choose to read. Guide them, but trust their own selections, since it is voluntary reading that you are trying to promote.

Parents' Responses to Home Reading Programs

Following are responses from parents who participated in a school-initiated home recreational reading program:

Gathering around the kitchen table and discussing things we had read made our family come together and talk to each other for a change.

The home reading program made us all aware of the fact that we hadn't been doing very much recreational reading.

We felt good about participating in the home reading program. We noticed that not only was there a change in our children's interest in reading, but our own as well. It was gratifying to see that we could make a difference.

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Reading by Choice, Not by Coercion

We teach youngsters to read as soon as they enter school because reading is necessary for full participation in a democratic society. And we hope children will become readers by choice, not by coercion.

Irving (1980) has stated, "One of the clear points to emerge from research into reading failure is that there was no association between reading and pleasure." Children who read only when in a skills-oriented reading group are not being taught a love for reading or a desire to read by choice. As long as skill development alone is seen as the key to literacy, the school will spend a great deal of time teaching skills. However, as Holdaway (1979) points out, it leaves no room for children to practice those skills. Holdaway proposes a developmental approach to literacy that highlights less teaching and more learning, learning that is self-regulated rather than adult-regulated. In such a setting, the teacher provides an environment rich with materials and activities from which children are invited to select, a social context where children are actively involved with other children, with the teacher, and with materials. The environment he recommends is emulative rather than instructional, providing lively examples of reading skills in action and use. Teachers present themselves as models involved in literary activities. They also serve as sources of support and positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior patterns in the child.

The recommendations in this fastback for promoting voluntary reading incorporate Holdaway's notion of a developmental approach to literacy. Through regularly scheduled literary activities and ready access to attractive and comfortable classroom library corners stocked with books and materials that in-

spire interest and active participation, children will associate reading with pleasure and develop an appreciation for books. Given time to use the library corner and participate in recreational reading activities, children will reinforce their learning of skills through enjoyable, self-selected practice. The outcome will be children who are not only capable of reading but who choose to read voluntarily.

The best measure of success for a reading instructional program is the enthusiasm and frequency with which children voluntarily approach reading. Love for reading and the desire to read "is not taught, it is created; is not demanded, it is exemplified; is not exacted, it is quickened; is not solicited, it is activated" (Stauffer 1970, p. 288).

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